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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by Droit à l'énergie SOS futur, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. Ensuring full employment and decent work for all is the best way for a country or region to escape the vicious cycle of poverty and achieve the goal of eradicating extreme poverty to which the States Members of the United Nations committed themselves in 2000. But this goal, noble as it is, will remain wishful thinking unless those States decide to back up their commitment with concrete steps, including one step that we view as an essential priority: ensuring access to energy and, more specifically, electricity.

It is certainly possible to live without electricity, as our forebears demonstrated. However, choosing to do so would amount to a complete negation of the Millennium Development Goals. Without energy, it is difficult, if not impossible, to fulfil the requirements of a decent standard of living: education, food, health, hygiene, access to potable water, sanitation and telecommunications, and so on.

2. In order to ensure economic development, a country needs an adequate energy base to establish and operate its basic infrastructure. A number of countries regarded as emerging economies lack such an energy base, which has relegated their populations to conditions of poverty, as indicated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development statistics. In such countries, universal access to energy or an increase in energy coverage stimulates decentralized economic activity and hence employment, in particular productive employment. The effects are many and diverse.

3. The development of economic activity resulting from the electrification of a region immediately generates employment in small businesses or local crafts. This often releases women and children from the tasks of seeking firewood and water supplies. More time is then available for other economic activities or, in the case of children, education, which will eventually facilitate access to work. Employment created in the energy production sector itself, particularly the electricity sector, contributes to the technological development of the countries and regions concerned through the technical expertise and know-how required for these sectors. If electrification is accompanied by intelligent transfer of technology, with companies providing the training necessary for absorbing that technology, this will create local expertise in that field.

4. The establishment of public-private partnerships, which we advocate, with endorsement of companies in exchange for ethical undertakings, is a win-win situation for employment. It creates activity and skilled jobs in emerging economies, while also allowing companies in industrialized countries to benefit, as a result, from an upsurge in their activity and hence in employment.

Finally, electrification of a geographical area contributes to reducing not only international but also domestic migratory flows. By encouraging local development, it reduces migration from rural to urban or peri-urban areas that are rife with violence and unemployment. Universal access to energy is an effective and peaceful way of encouraging populations to settle in their regions of origin.

The impact of electrification is felt in a number of ways: it reduces pressure on large urban areas, while ensuring that people settle in natural employment areas. It

also has a positive impact on efforts to combat climate change and greenhouse gas emissions through a proactive policy of access to and control of energy use.

5. Droit à l'énergie, with a network of 700 organizations in 70 countries comprising over 60 million people, proposes to make universal access to energy an essential requirement and has drafted an action plan to that end. It focuses on three areas: the Millennium Development Goals, public-private partnerships and active involvement of civil society at all stages of development.